

756 is used by the shaman to extract from afflicted people the *yakip*, or malignant object sent by the mother of the game. All these instruments are inert until the shaman blows power-giving tobacco smoke upon them. They are then thought to be "alive" and to have "strength."

DISEASE AND ITS TREATMENT

753 In order to understand fully the important role that the shaman plays among the Mundurucu, their theories of disease and affliction must be outlined. There is practically no human misfortune that cannot be attributed to supernatural influences. If a Mundurucu suffers a slight cut on his foot, he may admit that it was due to sheer mischance. But if he incurs a serious wound, the shaman is usually consulted and invariably attributes the affliction to the vengeance of the mother of the game. Any infection, pain, or other aftereffect of the wound is generally thought to be the work of the *yakip*, which is sent by the mother of the game or by the soul of the animal offended by the wounded man. Similarly, a snake bite, a fall from a tree, or any other serious misadventure that cannot be classified as a disease is usually diagnosed by the shaman as the vengeance of the animal world.

[754] Diseases also are the result of evil supernatural influences. But whereas serious accidents are attributed to the spirit mother and therefore to the negligence or stupidity of the stricken person, disease strikes people regardless of their activities. And though afflictions that have clear and obvious causes, as cuts or snake bites, are also thought to be the vengeance of the supernaturals associated with the animals, disease is caused by sorcerers. All sorcerers are shamans who consciously wish to hurt their fellow men. The sorcerer causes disease by modeling a variety of objects and blowing smoke upon them to give them life. The evil objects, called *causi*, are then wafted off on the wind to wander through the air until they encounter some human. Invisible to ordinary people, they enter the body and cause illness. The particular illness depends upon the material out of which the *causi* was modeled and the shape given it by the sorcerer.

755 Two distinct processes are required for the proper cure of illness. First the *causi* is extracted from the sick person's body by the shaman, and he then prescribes
 757 certain herbal remedies to repair the damage caused by it. The first part of the cure is uniform for all *causi*; the herbal remedy prescribed is, however, specific for the malady.

755 The process of extracting a *causi* is extremely simple. The sick person strips his
 276 or her clothes from the part of the body where the pain is localized and sits or lies on the ground. The treatment most often takes place in the patient's dwelling, but the shaman sometimes receives the ill in the men's house. After the patient is prepared, the shaman takes one of his large cigarettes, which are wrapped in a thin layer of the inner bark of the tauari tree, and commences to smoke. As he smokes he crouches over the sick person and intently stares at his body. The shaman does not inhale or swallow excessive amounts of smoke, and narcotic effects are specifically denied. Rather, the smoke heightens his extra-visual ability

Murphy: Mundurucu Religion

33

to see the *cauši* within the patient's body, and he is considered to be in a state of intense concentration. During this period the many observers of the cure fall silent, and even the children are hushed. After completing his examination and identification of the *cauši* lodged within the patient's body, the shaman blows clouds of smoke over him. This is an essential part of the cure, for the tobacco smoke is believed to dislodge the *cauši* from its place deep within the sick person and to bring it nearer to the surface, from where it can be easily extracted. Once the shaman has accomplished this end, he commences to massage the patient's body, stroking inward toward the point where the pain is localized. At the completion of the massaging the *cauši* is believed to be directly below the skin and just above the source of pain. The shaman quickly applies his mouth to this point and sucks noisily at the patient's skin. He then draws away and deftly removes the *cauši* from his mouth, into which he has supposedly sucked it, and holds it out in his open palm for all to observe. He examines it with great care for some time and throws it into a fire, where it is thought to be completely destroyed. The object exhibited by the shaman is usually a small piece of wood or the pit of a palm fruit. The sleight of hand involved apparently requires no great ingenuity, but everybody is firmly convinced that the shaman has really extracted an evil object from the patient. I was unable to induce any shaman to reveal the innermost secrets of his art, but I am convinced that the shaman, too, believes that he extracts *cauši*, elusive though his reasoning may be.

The sole deviation from the above procedure occurs during the extraction of a very large and dangerous *cauši*. The shaman localizes the object and brings it to the surface of the body in the usual manner, but he extracts it with a quick, grabbing motion of the hand.

The *cauši* is visible to the shaman both when flying freely through the air and when lodged in the patient's body. Ordinary persons can see it only after the shaman has extracted it. There are ten reported varieties of *cauši*, each of which represents a type of disease recognized by the Mundurucu. The *cauši* is believed to wreak considerable damage while in the sick person, and its extraction and destruction is not sufficient for a full recovery. This can only be through the application of herbal remedies, each of which is a specific for a certain type of *cauši*. These medicines are thought by the Mundurucu to be either "hot" or "cold"; the *cauši* is believed to cause considerable internal bleeding, and hot medicines remove this old blood from the body, and on the other hand, cold medicines reduce fever and alleviate pain.

The following is a list of the ten varieties of disease recognized by the Mundurucu and a description of the *cauši* believed to cause each and the medicinals used to repair their damage.

1. *Dau* (leg) *pipi* (pain), or pain in the leg, is caused by a *cauši* carved in the shape of a sting ray and made from its tail. This *cauši* lies on the floor in the doorways of houses and waits for an unwary person to step on it. Although it causes intense pains in the leg, its effects are not fatal. To cure the aftereffects of *dau*

755

276

755

753

755

278

757

753 *pipi*, the shaman beats the leaves of a *tracua* vine over a fire and applies them to
 755 the center of the pain. This poultice, despite being heated, is considered a cold
 278 remedy.

757 2. *Ipsa pipi*, or pain in the stomach, is instigated by a *casai* that is made from a
 bitter manioc tuber or a piece of soap. When the object is made from soap it causes
 a mild stomach-ache, but when made from bitter manioc the poison is believed
 capable of killing the victim. Three varieties of cold medicine are used to cure the
 aftereffects of this illness. An unidentified species of potato is grated in water,
 and part of the mixture is drunk while the rest is poured over the patient's stom-
 ach. Another remedy uses a few scrapings from the *castanha de arara* mixed in
 water and taken both externally and internally. Also, the root of the *jambú* plant
 is beaten into a half-gourd of water and drunk.

3. *Eksabi pipi*, pain in the back, differs from the other ailments in that it is
 caused by a *casai* that is actually a living bird. This bird, a species of *curujá da*
noite, can be heard at night, but is never seen. When it flies directly above the
 house, the inhabitants are in danger of being afflicted with backache. A cold rem-
 edy for backache consists of a paste of grated ginger root which is applied to the
 affected parts. Another medicine is made in a similar fashion from the root of an
 unidentified shrub.

4. The material and form of the *casai* that causes *sunsabi pipi*, or pain in the
 side, was not known by my informants, although five remedies were listed as
 effective in its cure. The following three are cold medicines. *Pau de candela* is
 grated into boiling water and the compound drunk while still very hot. A broth
 is also made from *envira de cacao*, and grated deer antler is mixed with cold water
 and used both internally and externally. Hot medicines include a poultice of
 heated *jamarú* leaf and a broth made of the ashes of *kamafu* cane mixed in hot
 water.

5. The common cold is called *ockō ockō*, an onomatopoeic word, and is believed
 to be caused by a *casai* which consists of a bit of talcum powder rolled in paper.
 Four cold remedies include hot drinks made with lemon, ginger root, the root
 of an unidentified shrub, and the sap from a tree. The only hot remedy known is
 made by boiling *mel de chupe* and taking it internally.

6. The *casai* that causes *nunchai pipi*, or pain in the uterus, is made from the
 root of an unidentified tree. Menstrual pains are not believed to be caused by this
 object, nor is it thought to cause labor pains. A hot medicine, used to free the
 woman of the old blood from the intra-uterine bleeding caused by this *casai*, is
 made by cutting up the root of a *paxiuba* palm and boiling it in water. Some of
 this preparation is administered internally, and the remainder is placed in a
 pot below the woman's hammock. The rising vapors are believed to aid in the cure.
 Ashes of the *paxiuba* palm are also mixed in water and drunk.

7. *Paia*, or fever, generally accompanies stomach-ache, according to inform-
 ants. Actually, such a concurrence of the two afflictions occurs during an attack
 of chronic malaria, and the stomach-ache is, more accurately, a pain in the liver.
 Two cold remedies are used to reduce the fever. The first is made by grating a

Murphy: Mundurucu Religion

35

vine in hot water and applying the mixture to the stomach. The other consists of 753
the trunks of very young buriti palms crushed in water. Part of this mixture is 755
drunk, and the rest is applied externally to the torso of the sick person. 278

8. *Ok pipi*, or intestinal pain, is caused by the same *causi* as *ipas pipi*, or stom- 757
ach-ache. However, the term *ok pipi* is in reality reserved for dysentery, for it is
always accompanied by severe diarrhea. The medicines used for stomach pains are
considered effective in the relief of intestinal pains also, but two additional cold
remedies are used as specifics for the diarrhea. The roots of a certain shrub are
boiled in water, part of which is taken internally and the rest allowed to steam
below the hammock. The leaves of this shrub are also applied to the abdomen as a
poultice. The same use is made of the leaves of the *murirú pagé*, a water plant.
The local Brazilians also boil the leaves of this plant and place the steaming pot
below the hammock of a bewitched person. The vapors are believed to cause an
evil object to fall out of the victim's body.

9. A *pipi*, or headache, is treated by mixing *envira de castanheira* in water and
applying the solution to the head. Unripe Brazil nuts are also grated into water
and similarly applied. Both remedies are considered cold. The nature of the *causi*
that causes headache was not known by the informants interviewed.

10. The tenth and last ailment is a three-stage sickness generally known by the
name applied to its first stage, called *ajewesé*. In this primary phase, the afflicted
man or woman becomes unhappy and listless and eats mud, soap, and other [264]
inedible substances. The symptoms increase in severity in the next stage, or *yaukú*,
and the victim becomes thin, yellow, and "bloodless." Finally, the patient passes
into the state known as *fewé*, at the end of which he usually dies. During the
final illness, the person's soul sometimes becomes one of the dreaded wandering
souls. The symptoms are descriptive of the chronic forms of a number of illnesses,
such as malaria, dysentery, and jaundice. The Mundurucu attribute it to a *causi*
made of roasted earthworms rolled into a ball and spread in the air. No remedies
were known.

A person can be afflicted by more than one *causi* at a time, and the shaman
often recommends a number of herbal preparations. The shaman does not him-
self administer these remedies, but instructs the kinsmen of the sick person
in their use. They then collect the proper herbs and apply them.

The techniques used by the Mundurucu shaman are so widely distributed 756
throughout eastern South America that any attempt to trace their provenience 171
would be overly lengthy. The shaman's use of tobacco smoke and the techniques
of sucking and massage are almost universal in the Amazon area. Of equally wide
distribution are the use of herbs and the various methods of applying them. In-
fusions, external applications, and steam baths are, as Lowie indicates,¹ known
among a number of tribes of the region.

One aspect of Mundurucu herbal medicine worthy of further discussion is the 278
division of remedies into hot and cold categories. This distinction is made through- 171
out most of Latin America with regard to both medicines and food. The Mun-

¹ Lowie, 1948, pp. 51-52.

279 durucú, however, do not classify their foods in this manner, suggesting that the
 171 concept was perhaps borrowed from their Brazilian neighbors together with certain medicinal recipes. Furthermore, although the list of diseases and remedies is undoubtedly incomplete, it is significant that only twenty-four herbal medicines were reported. A much longer list could be collected among rural Brazilians of the area, who also use most of the same herbs employed by the Mundurucú.* This leads immediately to the question of whether the civilized inhabitants of the Amazon borrowed the medicinal preparations from the Indians or whether diffusion operated in the reverse direction. Although the use of herbs by the Indian population of the Amazon is undoubtedly a pre-Columbian practice, and although diffusion probably operated in both directions, it is very possible that the greatest borrowing was by the Indians. This is probably true for the Mundurucú, although we cannot be so certain for the first Indian groups encountered by the Portuguese. The herbal knowledge of these coastal tribes is, of course, crucial to the question.

753 The Mundurucú theory of disease exists side-by-side with certain sound empirical observations on the subject. They are well aware that epidemics are contracted through contact with white people. For example, when either my wife or I caught a cold, the Mundurucú avoided close proximity to us. Even on those occasions when we fell ill after an epidemic had already developed in the village, they were inclined to blame us. Also, they recognized that residence along waterways or near swamps was often accompanied by fevers (malaria), and they knew that the savannah villages were therefore more salubrious. Both contagion and the unhealthfulness of certain locales were loosely connected with the prevalence of the sorcerer's evil objects, or *cauá*, despite the contradiction implied. However, in this as in many other lines of thought, the Mundurucú do not push logic to its conclusion, for the roots of the supernatural concepts are social and not intellectual. The empirical observations and supernatural concepts coexisted with little effort on the part of the Mundurucú to integrate them, if, indeed, they were aware of the mutual antipathy of the two.

757 Moreover, despite their supernatural explanation of disease, the Mundurucú
 755 freely sought the rational medication that we provided. Every day, a number of people came to our house for treatment, some from other villages; in only a very few cases did we have to seek out the sick and persuade them to accept our aid. Our experience in this matter was not unique, for both the mission and the Indian Post dispensed large quantities of medicine to Mundurucú patients. Not even the *ahamans* resisted treatment; many were, in fact, our most faithful patients.

There are a number of reasons for this lack of resistance to Western medicine by the Mundurucú. Through long contact with the whites, they had come to recognize the efficacy of the white man's medicines, especially in the treatment of diseases they know to be associated with the civilized population. Some even knew the names of specific remedies; I had the unusual experience of having a tattooed, seminude Indian ask me for "*sal/d*."

* Note also the many herbal remedies reported by Wagley (1953, pp. 241-252) from the Amazon River town of Iltá.

Murphy: Mundurucú Religion

37

This receptivity has, in part, been communicated to them by the whites. The Brazilian population of the near-by Tapajós River places high value upon modern medicines, despite their accompanying belief in witchcraft, their use of herbs, and occasional resort to shamanism. Wherever we traveled, we were continually visited by sick or wounded people. The fact that we were not medical practitioners did not affect our position as curers. It was sufficient that we were American scientists and must, therefore, possess adequate knowledge and equipment to cure almost any disease. Penicillin was endowed with quasi-magical qualities by the backwoods Brazilians, and they used it to cure backaches, sprains, and intestinal ailments, as well as various types of infection. These attitudes have diffused to the Mundurucú, and our medicines were accorded high prestige by them. But, more importantly, Western medicines accorded with their own techniques for the treatment of disease. They placed the use of aspirin, sulfa, and other drugs in the same category as their own herbal remedies, and believed that they repaired the damage done by the evil objects, or *osai*, of the sorcerer. Thus, they would go first to the shaman to have the intrusive object removed and then to us for medication; neither by itself was considered sufficient for a complete cure.

The accommodation of rational medication to aboriginal curing techniques furthered Mundurucú acceptance of Western medicine more than did the example and prestige of the white man. For example, the Mundurucú were convinced that a feverish person should be made cool. The result of this erroneous, albeit clear and simple, logic was that the sick took frequent baths in cold streams and lay upon the cool floors of their houses rather than in their hammocks. We, and the priests for many years before, repeatedly cautioned them against this practice, but our words went completely unheeded. The result was that a person afflicted with slight cold and fever soon developed a violent gripe. The Mundurucú were not impressed by the clear association between bathing and a worsened condition, for the seriousness of an illness was believed to be a direct function of the type and strength of the *osai* that caused it. Similarly, we had very little success in convincing the Mundurucú of the savannah villagers that they could prevent malaria by purchasing mosquito nets and sleeping in them during their summer stay on the banks of the large streams. Whether our explanation that the *osai* that caused fever were afraid of mosquito netting was ultimately of some influence could not be ascertained. Needless to say, we were not looked upon as authorities on *osai*.

The techniques used to cure attacks by the animal spirits or by the *Yurupari* are somewhat different from the remedies for *osai*. Although both involve the extraction of an intrusive object from the patient's body, different methods are used. Also, no herbal treatments are used to right the damage done by these supernatural.

The malignant stone cast by the *Yurupari* into its victim is considered far too dangerous to be sucked out by the shaman. Special precautions must be taken during a cure, and shamans are truly apprehensive while treating an afflicted person. The following case of a *Yurupari* attack will perhaps illustrate

/15 cont. /

Also:

*241
192
262

pepper—achi, achi a, four varietiesbanana—aku, 11 varietiescotton—buru, two varietiesurucú—tyuku, tyuku apapaya—aslu a, two varieties

*241

There is, therefore, a small group of plants which are found in the gardens as well as out: pepper, bananas, cotton, urucú, and papayas.

[249]

For certain plant species, such as for example tobacco and the curauá pineapple, a plot of ground is often set aside, or a small garden is prepared separately.

249

[302]

Aside from these plants, which are useful to subsistence, the Mundurukú also have a certain number of vegetables which back-woodsmen call "smell" and which they use when they are bathing, to give their body, and especially their hair, a more pleasant odor.

• [157]
[189]

A few herbs are also cultivated for medicinal purposes. Others yet are used in the practice of certain superstitions and charms. Although I am aware that these subjects are not directly related to agriculture, I mention them in passing since "cultivated plants" are involved.

*241
177

From this list, it becomes clear that the Mundurukú must have had considerable contact with civilization and with other tribes to have acquired such a number of useful plants. As for the ancient stock of plants cultivated by the Indians in the Amazon forest, tubercles must be mentioned first and foremost. Moreover, /16/ it seems that the use of some of these typically native plants, such as for example curauá pineapple or sweet manioc, is not very old, for a series of tribes possessing a type of agriculture quite similar to that of the Mundurukú are not yet familiar with the cultivation of sweet manioc or curauá pineapple. (9)

[71]

9. Thus, for instance, the majority of the Carib tribes of the Brazilian Guianas are unfamiliar with the cultivation